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### Ohio State Engineer

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH TO THE ENGINEER IN INDUSTRY<sup>1</sup>

C. F. KETTERING, General Motors Corp., Detroit

A MAN'S English is an index to his mind. A paper or report that is clearly and precisely written indicates sound reasoning and reliable results. An obscure, poorly written manuscript may disclose illogical and muddled thinking.

Success in engineering and research depends as much upon the ability to present an idea convincingly as it does upon the ability to perform calculations or experiments. You may perform the most miraculous experiment in the laboratory, yet you have not contributed anything to the advancement of knowledge until you have transmitted your results to others. It is only by speech and writing that the discoveries made in the laboratories are made useful. Scientific men too often look upon writing reports or making talks as an irksome part of their job and do as little of it as possible. Engineering work is not finished until the results are clearly recorded and presented to others.

The everyday use of English by the engineer is to write technical reports on his work for presentation to other engineers or to the management. These reports must present the results of his investigation in an accurate and orderly manner to those immediately interested in the work, and also to acquaint executives with the progress being made on the subject. After years of trying different methods of preparing technical reports, we have developed a procedure which makes it possible for everyone interested in the work to get the information he is after. On the first page, we start with a short foreword which explains, in general terms, the subject and reasons for the investigation. The second page contains the conclusions; concise

and to the point. For the busy engineer or executive, the whole story is on the first two pages. The remainder of the report contains a complete history of the development for the men who may be interested in the details of the project.

But in a larger sense, the engineer has an opportunity to use English in furthering the general understanding of the economic forces at work in our civilization. One reason why scientific work is publicly discredited and blamed for economic difficulties is because it is not understood by the average man. Science and engineering needs interpreters to translate its findings into terminology understandable to all. One of the greatest problems in engineering and in science is to take a few days off and try to make plain to many people the things we know so well. In other words, we need to get information, technical and otherwise, to flow down through to the public, because they are hungry to read and learn about the technical world. It is the job of the engineer or scientist, who has the technical background, to interpret the technical facts upon which modern civilization is based into language which everyone can understand.

The engineer who learns to master English and use it in these two important ways will do most to advance his chosen profession. He will be able to present his own investigations to his fellow engineers. More important still, he will be able to gain the understanding of our people who are interested in technical subjects, yet need them explained in simple language.

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<sup>1</sup> From "English Notes," *The Journal of Engineering Education*, Vol. XXVII, No. 5, January, 1937.